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Security Council

Fifty-fourth Year

Provisional

3975th Meeting

Wednesday, 10 February 1999, 4.15 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Fowler	(Canada)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Al-Dosari
	Brazil	Mr. Felicio
	China	Mr. Chen Xu
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Hasmy
	Namibia	Mr. Andjaba
	Netherlands	Mr. Kooijmans
	Russian Federation	Mr. Granovsky
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

99-85094 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.15 p.m.

Tribute to the memory of King Hussein of Jordan

The President (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I should like to express profound grief and sorrow at the death of His Majesty King Hussein Ibn Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. King Hussein's entire life was dedicated to a devoted service to his country and a tireless search for peace, stability and understanding in the Middle East. His loss will be greatly felt.

On behalf of the Security Council, I should like to convey to His Majesty King Abdullah, the bereaved family and the people of Jordan the Council's profound condolences.

I now invite the members of the Council to rise and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Majesty King Hussein Ibn Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President (*interpretation from French*): As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Celso Amorim, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Security Council for the month of January 1999. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Amorim for the great diplomatic skill with which he conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Eritrea and Ethiopia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea) and Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia) took seats at the Council table.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/1999/133, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations. I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to the following other documents: S/1999/97, S/1999/117 and S/1999/128, letters dated 29 January, 5 and 8 February 1999, respectively, from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/1999/104, S/1999/115, S/1999/119 and S/1999/131, letters dated 2, 4, 5 and 9 February 1999, respectively, from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; and S/1999/126, letter dated 8 February 1999, from the Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The first speaker on my list is the representative of Ethiopia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council. I also wish to thank your predecessor for his excellent leadership of the work of the Council last month.

It has now been almost nine months since the Eritrean regime committed an act of aggression against Ethiopia and occupied Ethiopia's territory by force. While fully recognizing its own right, as a sovereign country, to defend itself, Ethiopia, however, chose to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Accordingly, as the Council knows full well, Ethiopia accepted peace proposals aimed at ending the dispute peacefully. In

particular, the Council is fully cognizant of Ethiopia's acceptance of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement, of which the Council, in its resolution 1226 (1999) of 29 January 1999, expressed its full support and called for full implementation without delay.

It is common knowledge, and the Council knows this very well, that Eritrea has rejected virtually all peace proposals and continues to create confusion by pretending that it remains engaged in the OAU process.

The facts speak for themselves. During the past nine months there has never been a single occasion when the Eritrean regime was engaged positively and constructively to resolve the crisis between Eritrea and Ethiopia. On the contrary, it left no stone unturned to frustrate all peace endeavours at all levels, including through well-known games and tactics, including the blackmail of mediators.

During the past nine months the Eritrean regime has not only consistently sabotaged and rejected all peace proposals, but has also carried out provocative military actions in order to create an atmosphere of general crisis and to divert the attention of the international community from the core issue: Eritrea's withdrawal from Ethiopian territory. It is exactly for that reason that the Eritrean regime launched a large-scale military action, including the aerial bombing of the town of Adigrat on 4, 5 and 6 February while the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General was in the region to persuade Eritrea to accept the OAU Framework Agreement.

In this regard, I wish to draw the Council's attention to my letters of 4 and 5 February 1999 and their annexes, in which I inform the President of the Council of these latest Eritrean military actions against Ethiopian military positions and civilian targets. Under these circumstances, and in view of Eritrea's continuous acts of provocation, the Ethiopian Government has had no option but to exercise its legitimate right of self-defence, as clearly stipulated in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

I now wish to briefly comment on the draft resolution before the Council. My delegation welcomes the fact that the Council reaffirms its resolution 1226 (1999), in which it strongly urged Eritrea to accept the OAU Framework Agreement without delay. I also welcome the fact that the Council has once again stressed that the OAU Framework Agreement remains a viable and sound solution for the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

We should also put on record our reservation in the strongest possible terms with regard to paragraph 7 of the draft resolution. It is a well-known fact that Ethiopia is a victim of Eritrean aggression and that its territory has been illegally occupied through the use of force for over eight months — as a result of which it is now engaged in an exercise of legitimate self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations — and it is patently contrary to elementary principles and a sense of justice to place the aggressor and the victim of aggression on the same footing and to call for the cessation of arms sales to both countries.

In this connection, we should recall how Ethiopia was treated by the League of Nations back in 1936, when the organization imposed an arms embargo on both fascist Italy and Ethiopia, knowing full well that fascist Italy — the aggressor — was self-sufficient in arms, while Ethiopia — a poor country — was trying to defend its sovereignty against a major European Power of the time.

History is repeating itself. It is well known that since Ethiopia does not have and would not have any relations with rogue States, it has no arms supplies. Calling for a cessation of arms sales to both Ethiopia and Eritrea when the latter retains intact its sources of arms — States whose commitment to international law is highly questionable at best — is, in effect, directed solely against law-abiding Ethiopia, a country without any source of arms supplies whatsoever. Moreover, it is clear that Eritrea is a country with a long coastline, while Ethiopia is a landlocked country. It does not require any stretch of the imagination to see which country can continue to import arms despite any call for a cessation of arms sales to both countries. Again, paragraph 7 of the draft resolution is, in the final analysis, targeted against Ethiopia.

Let me conclude by stating that our infinite patience and readiness to cooperate with parties working for a peaceful resolution of the dispute — in spite of our being a victim of aggression — should not be mistaken as a slackening of our resolve to defend our sovereignty.

The President: I thank the representative of Ethiopia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Eritrea, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): I am honoured to address the Security Council at this meeting to consider the current draft resolution on the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict. Indeed, my Government appreciates the serious concern of the Council over the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the dangerous level to which it has been escalated by the Ethiopian Government. Eritrea further welcomes the Council's decision to be actively seized of the issue.

My Government has presented in writing its considered reaction to the last resolution concerning the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia — resolution 1226 (1999) — and I need not repeat it here. Needless to say, the concerns to which Eritrea tried to alert the Council in its presentation have unfortunately come to pass. Ethiopia has broken the de facto truce that had existed since June and restarted an all-out offensive against Eritrea.

It is a fact known to members of the Council that Eritrea has constantly and consistently called from the outset of this conflict for a renouncement of the threat and use of force, for a firm, irreversible commitment to a peaceful and legal solution of the conflict and for a binding ceasefire or cessation of hostilities so that an atmosphere conducive to the continuation and success of the peace process can be created. Such calls were repeated by the international community, including the Council. Sadly, these calls were adamantly rejected by Ethiopia. Nonetheless, Eritrea continued to engage in good faith with all peace endeavours by concerned parties, while reaffirming that despite Ethiopia's constant threats and declared preparations for war, it would never shoot unless shot at.

My country has been shot at and has been forced to defend itself in the current all-out offensive that the Ethiopian regime has unleashed on it. Indeed, the fact that Ethiopia intended and was preparing to do just that was never hidden from the international community. Consistent with its Parliament's standing declaration that unless Eritrea unilaterally and unconditionally withdraws from its own territory that Ethiopia claims, Ethiopia will make it do so by force, the Ethiopian Government has — going from bad to worse — escalated this conflict from a containable border skirmish to an all-out war.

The fact that Ethiopia started this current offensive and violated the United States-brokered moratorium on air attacks has been ascertained by all those who have followed and witnessed its final preparations and the actual launch and conduct of the current offensive — contrary to its useless but usual attempt to deny it. We are sure that this fact cannot be unknown to members' Governments as well, as representatives of the diplomatic community in either or both countries, including those of Council members' Governments, have followed or witnessed the facts for themselves.

Summarizing the overwhelming independent eyewitness reports of the developments on the ground, Global Intelligence Update writes,

> "Ethiopia launched an offensive against neighbouring Eritrea on February 6, ostensibly aimed at retaking the disputed border area of Badme."

The Update goes on to warn,

> "The problem for international organizations attempting to broker a peace treaty between the two countries is that the dispute is not that simple. Ethiopia has not expended an estimated $300 million on arms since last June simply to retake a desolate patch of rocks."

Concerning the violation of the moratorium on air strikes, none other than President Clinton, the broker and thus custodian of that moratorium, has clearly indicated that it is Ethiopia that did so. He said:

> "I am particularly alarmed by the recent use of air power, which escalates the conflict and violates the agreed moratorium. I urge the Ethiopian Government to refrain from further use of its aircraft as currently employed along the border."

A myriad of independent on-site witnesses of the Ethiopian air bombardment of towns and other civilian centres, including camps set up for deportees from Ethiopia, some 30 kilometres away from the war front, have reported the death of innocent civilians and the devastation of property such bombings are causing.

The danger that Ethiopia's all-out war poses for the security of the entire region and beyond, in addition to its immediate negative consequences on the process to achieve a peaceful resolution of the border dispute, cannot escape members of the Council. While these remain the facts and consequences of the Ethiopian Government's persistent recourse to force, it is indeed tragic and regrettable that the Security Council, the very body entrusted with ensuring international security, would gloss over this danger and not condemn the Ethiopian

regime for its irresponsible resort to force to resolve what, indeed, is a border conflict. Not to do so, to allow the Ethiopian regime to continue to wage war with impunity in violation of another country's sovereignty, would only encourage Ethiopia, as it has done so far, to continue on its warpath, with very grave consequences. The Security Council will then have to share responsibility for those consequences.

Ethiopia alone bears full responsibility for the start and escalation of this conflict to a full-scale war, including by starting the current offensive. Eritrea urges the Security Council to take note of this fact and act appropriately.

The President: It is my understanding that the Security Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution (S/1999/133) before it. If I hear no objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Gabon, Gambia, Malaysia, Namibia, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1227 (1999).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.